I grew up on a tiny island in the Caribbean, where the air always smelled fresh and salty, the sunsets were always bright and long, and there were lizards EVERYWHERE (YES!!). My name is Caroline Corder, I was 5 when my parents moved us to our little island, and I still don’t know why we moved. We lived in a small neighborhood that belonged to the oil refinery my father worked for, it was one of four housing communities owned by the refinery; we lived in the one called “Blessing”.

I spent most of my days outside, roaming around various parts of the island. I remember spending hours with my best friend Sky, sitting in the big Flamboyant tree behind my house; we called her “Flammy” and she was like a second home to us, a space that was just ours. Her trunk was split in half and the first of her branches didn’t appear until about 7-8 feet up, so we were the only ones who could climb her. No siblings, no parents, just us.

We had a favorite branch we would sit on, it was shaped like a prong, so we could sit across from each other and we would have competitions to see who could jump from the highest point without getting hurt. When we weren’t playing games we would just sit on our branch and talk for hours, making up stories and imagining what it would be like if we lived in Flammy. I would stroke her fat red blossoms while we talked, and Sky would say things like, “One day when we’re older you and I can live in a tree for real and be like real sisters.” I loved imagining that.

We didn’t always hang out at my place though, half the time we stayed at Sky’s. She lived in a small bungalow, I think it was pink. There was a chain link fence around the yard and a cherry tree with white blossoms around the side. We used to wait for her parents to go to work and then we would use the hurricane shutters as a ladder to scale the side of the house onto the roof. The roof was white on top and scorching hot. The first time we went up there we found a big cow skull. Her father was a musician and her mother made jewelry and worked for our school. It was a good life, where we had infinite freedom. We could go as high as we could climb, as deep as we could swim, and as far as we could run. We did everything together, us against the world…my sister in arms.

When I was 13 my parents decided to move back to Georgia. I’ve been back to St. Croix a few times since, and it still feels like home, but it also feels completely different. I’ve stayed in touch with Sky over the years, and even stayed with her on the island a couple of times, but even that is different now.